

6 Aruba versus the rest

The case for separatism and non-sovereignty

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Introduction

Despite fierce opposition from the Netherlands and the Netherlands Antilles – then consisting of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St. Eustatius and St. Maarten – and after a struggle that surfaced for the first time in the 1930s, Aruba obtained a separate status ('Status Aparte') as an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1986. To achieve this, Aruba had to sidestep the United Nations' non-disruption principle and ascertain the right of self-determination and at the same time avoid forced independence as a final outcome of its decolonization process. The decolonization of Suriname in 1975 resulted in a military coup d'état in 1980 and the December killings of 1982. This confirmed to most Arubans that leaving the Kingdom was not a desirable way forward. Still, in 1983, under Dutch pressure, it was agreed that Aruba would obtain Status Aparte in 1986 as a transition period towards full independence by 1996. Nevertheless, this disputed package deal was cancelled in 1995. This chapter discusses the long and arduous road of separatism in a small, multiethnic island society in a unfriendly political environment in which the colonial power of the Netherlands and the sister islands of the Netherlands Antilles obstructed the effectuation of the island self-determination.

Mechanisms and processes: Configurations and layers of power

The oil industry

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, Aruba was one of the least developed islands in the Caribbean. There were just over 9,000 inhabitants, who were descendants of Amerindians and European colonists who had settled on the island by the mid-eighteenth century, accompanied by descendants of enslaved Africans. The latter never made up more than 21 percent of the population. Subsistence farming and fishing were the main means of livelihood. A small number of European colonist families in the capital city of Oranjestad managed to acquire elite status through trade and aloe cultivation.

The discovery of oil reserves in Venezuela's Lake Maracaibo in 1914 kick-started the industrial revolution in the Leeward Islands. Because of the volatile political climate in Venezuela, international oil companies deemed it safer to build their refineries on the nearby Dutch islands of Curaçao and Aruba. Crucial for the developments in Aruba was the establishment of the Lago Oil and Transport Company in 1924 at the southeastern tip of the island. The company was taken over by the Esso group in 1932. In 1948, Lago provided employment to 8,262 people. In the wake of the oil industry, thousands of predominantly English-speaking workers from the Caribbean islands and the Guianas migrated to Aruba. The island population increased to 60,000 in 1960. For the rural Aruban population, the arrival of the oil industry brought along English-speaking Afro-Caribbean migrants who surpassed them in position, education, income and prestige. Meanwhile, the traditional elite families saw their trade monopolies undermined by foreign firms and Jewish, Lebanese and Chinese newcomers. And the island's administrative autonomy was eroded by the increasing interference of the colonial authorities from Curaçao.

The separatist movement

The colonial government residing in Curaçao took control over the island administration. A reaction was to be expected. The powerless island administrative body, the Raad van Politie, or Police Council, consisted of an appointed lieutenant governor and two elected members, often chosen by no more than a handful of (affluent, tax-paying) voters. As early as 1931, the Police Council sent a petition to the Netherlands, pleading for 'a greater degree of independent authority (with regard to) the main island of Curaçao'. The Dutch authorities did not react to the request. On December 6, 1942, Dutch Queen Wilhelmina announced her intention to reorganize the Kingdom's structures after the World War based on the wishes as expressed by the populations. This concession was mainly aimed at keeping Dutch East-India in the Kingdom, but the Arubans became aware of the danger of being permanently subordinated to Curaçao as a result of the decolonization process. A nationalist movement fire flared up, and under the motto 'Separacion!', [Separation!], Henny Eman (1887–1957), a member of the local protestant elite Eman family, led the fight for the secession from remaining a colony of Curaçao. The bond with the Netherlands was – and still is – seen as vital and indissoluble by the majority of Arubans (Alofs, 2011; Veenendaal & Oostindie, 2018).

The peak of the separatist movement occurred in the run-up to the Round Table Conference of 1948 about the future of the Kingdom. Between September 1947 and January 1948, 2,147 Arubans signed a petition in which they requested 'to be separated financially, economically, administratively and governmentally from the island of Curaçao'. Albert Eman (1916–1967), son of Henny Eman, presented the petition to the queen and introduced it by way of a motion in the conference on March 18, the day that became Aruba's National Hymn and Flag Day in 1976.

The aversion to increasing external influences formed the social basis of the popularity of the separatists. Slogans like 'Aruba for the Arubans' not only

referred to the desire for greater island independence; they also had an ethnic and racist undertone. The nationalism of the separatist movement was thus also an ethnic movement that sought the emancipation of the rural Aruban population. Eman's party, the Aruban People's Party (AVP), won the first general election in 1949, defeating the predominantly Roman Catholic *Union Nacional Arubano*.

From protest to cooperation

During the 1948 Round Table Conference, Eman's motion was adopted, and the Aruba-Curaçao Commission proposed a Dutch Antillean federation with equal rights and equal representation in parliament for Curaçao and Aruba. The fact that the wishes of the separatists were not implemented was the result of the reluctant attitude of the political elite of Curaçao and the Dutch government. After a long series of negotiations, the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands (1954) and the State Regulations of the Netherlands Antilles (1955) established the legal order of the Kingdom. The Kingdom was to consist of three countries: the Netherlands, Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles. The countries were autonomous, but the Kingdom (read: the Netherlands) was responsible for – amongst others – defence, foreign affairs and protecting the rule of law.

At that point, the Netherlands Antilles formed a non-sovereign state with two levels of government. The 'ABC' island territories close to the coast of Venezuela – Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao – and the Windward Islands – Sint Maarten, Saba and St Eustatius – each obtained their elected Island Councils. At the central level, a unicameral system was introduced. The population of the islands elected their representatives to the national parliament, the Staten. The Staten had twenty-two, seats of which – much against Aruba's desires – twelve members were elected from Curaçao, eight from Aruba, one from Bonaire and one from the Windward Islands. Based on the distribution of seats, government coalitions would be formed. The central government, situated in and dominated by Curaçao, was given great influence because it controlled all issues that could be regulated uniformly for several islands without the consent of the island territories.

It was not only the attitude of the Netherlands and Curaçao that had stood in the way of realizing the separatists' goals. The disintegration of the movement was also an important factor. After a disagreement between Eman and his right-hand man, banker Juancho Irausquin (1904–1962) in 1949, supporters became divided between Eman's AVP and Irausquin's newly founded *Partido Patriótico Arubano* (PPA). Repeated efforts by father and son Eman to limit voting rights for migrants, and failed efforts to intervene in a major strike at Lago in 1952, alienated them from the migrant segment of the electorate. An equally failed attempt to regulate prostitution by the introduction of a state-licensed brothel cost Eman the support of confessional Aruban voters and the powerful local Roman Catholic Church.

The emergence of new political alliances had a crippling effect on separatism. The alliance of the elite, immigrant and rural population made the PPA the majority party. In 1955, the PPA captured fifteen of the twenty-one seats in the

Island Council elections, a margin of victory that has not been matched since. The PPA came to power both at the island and the national level, and the Netherlands Antilles experienced a period of political stability between 1955 and 1969. As long as the Aruban Island Council was not overruled by the national cabinet, the centrifugal forces in island relations could be warded off (Alofs, 2001; Alofs & Merckies, 2001).

From status quo to status aparte

The balance of power started to shift, and the desire for a greater degree of autonomy reared its head again. The PPA struggled with the succession of Irausquin, who died in 1962. In addition, ethnic voter loyalty did not resonate as well with the second generation of immigrants. In 1967, the PPA lost the island council elections to the united opposition, led by AVP leader Albert Eman, who again demanded more island autonomy.

The revival of the old separatist ideals can be attributed to three factors. First, in 1968, the national cabinet consisting of the Curaçaoan Democratic Party (DP) and Aruba's PPA proposed to change the electoral system. This confirmed that the Aruba's fear of being overruled by the central government was not unfounded. Second, a major revolt took place in Curaçao on May 30, 1969, resulting in two deaths and with parts of the capital, Willemstad, going up in flames. Because the uprising was seen as an internal Curaçaoan matter, the Arubans were reluctant to have to contribute to the costly repairs. Third, in 1971, Dutch parliamentarians announced their intention to discuss the decolonization of the Antilles in the near future. This was like oil to the fire of the separatist movement.

The breakthrough of the secessionist movement occurred after the sudden death of AVP leader Albert Eman in 1967, six weeks after elections that brought his party back into power in Aruba. A leadership crisis arose. A possible successor was promising AVP deputy Gilberto Francois 'Betico' Croes (1938–1986), a teacher from the rural town of Santa Cruz. But, after seeing the leadership pass him by, Croes founded his own *Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo* (MEP) in 1971. Croes turned a new page in the political history of Aruba.

The new nationalism owed its popularity significantly to the political intentions and charisma of Betico Croes. He was the first rural politician in Aruba to offer an alternative to the established parties and the economic elite of Oranjestad who dominated the national coalition partner PPA while expressing the sense of disadvantage of the immigrant populations of San Nicolas. When the MEP gained political power in 1973, positions in the civil service, political appointments, scholarships and the like became available to its supporters, which contributed to boosting the socio-economic status of the rural population. However, ethnic stereotypes around their Amerindian past, provincialism and family orientation still expressed the low esteem of the rural population. Betico Croes responded by placing the traditional identity and folklore of Aruba at the heart of nationalist identity politics. To legitimize the desire for secession from Curaçao, the (imagined) Amerindian alignment and colonial past were emphasized and contrasted with the

Afro-Caribbean character of Curaçao identity. At the same time, the cultural distance from the Afro-Caribbean migrants in Aruba was magnified. As in the years of *separacion*, the Status Aparte movement was both an island-specific and an ethnic emancipation movement. Between 1973 and 1985, the MEP could count on the support of 54 to 59 percent of the voters (Alofs, 2001; Alofs & Merckies, 2001).

Negotiations for a separate status

Initially, Croes envisioned a restructuring of the Netherlands Antilles along the lines of the federal model of the 1948 Aruba-Curaçao Commission. After a resolute rejection by major Curaçao parties, Croes switched to the old separatist ideals. Aruba had to secede from the Netherlands Antilles to assume a separate status and become the third partner in the Kingdom after the independence of Suriname in 1975.

In 1973 and 1975, as a national coalition partner, the MEP passed motions that recognized the 'inalienable right of every people's community, and therefore of each of the islands of the Netherlands Antilles, to determine its own constitutional status'. Even the Dutch cabinet promised support to the realization of the Status Aparte. The constitutional issue proved a politically divisive riddle which resulted in the breakup of several national cabinets in which the MEP participated. This only helped to further reinforce the determination of the Aruba secessionist movement.

The MEP-dominated Island Council organized a consultative referendum in March 1977: 57 percent of the electorate supported the secession plans. In June of that same year, the MEP garnered 54 percent of the Aruban vote during the Netherlands Antillean elections. After Croes was kept out of the national cabinet in favour of the smaller PPA, anti-Curaçao and anti-PPA sentiments peaked. In August 1977, strikes got out of hand, and a shooting took place in which PPA vote-getter Guillermo Trinidad's (later MEP) car was hit. Products from Curaçao were boycotted, and ships from that island remained unloaded. The power supply was shut down for a week – which is why the events are known as 'Agosto Scur': Dark August. Eventually, the national government sent police reinforcements from Curaçao to restore peace and order. For the Aruban separatists, the intervention once again confirmed the island's subordination to Curaçao. A month later, an Aruban delegation went to The Hague to plead for a Status Aparte. Possibly because the Netherlands feared a repetition of the events in August and to have to intervene militarily – as in Curaçao, May 30, 1969 – the Dutch government granted Aruba its own seat at the negotiation table.

In the years 1977–1983, efforts were made in vain to create a new position for Aruba in the Kingdom because agreement could not be reached on the sensitive points of decentralization and distribution of power. It became necessary to fundamentally revise the 1954 Charter. Meanwhile, a new descendant of the Eman dynasty made his entrance into politics: J.H.A. 'Henny' Eman (1948–), grandson of the separatist leader of the same name and son of Albert. He made a strong case for securing the Status Aparte without leaving any ambiguity about the need to

hold on to Kingdom ties. In the 1982 elections, his AVP garnered nearly 30 percent of the vote, enough to participate in the national cabinet (1982–1984). Antillean willingness to comply with Aruban wishes came about under this cabinet. Antillean parties endorsed that Aruba acquire its separate status and not be forced to become independent under any circumstances, and thus they would no longer block Aruba's secession (Croes, 2011, pp. 177–178).

During the Round Table Conference of March 1983 in The Hague, it was decided to grant Aruba Status Aparte as of January 1, 1986, and to recognize it as an autonomous country in the Kingdom. The Netherlands, however, did attach the condition to the granting of the Aruban wish that this was not a final but a temporary situation. In 1996, the island would have to accept independence. By making this demand, the Dutch government wanted to prevent Curaçao and St. Maarten from following the Aruban example and the Antilles from falling apart.

In Aruba, reactions to the negotiation results were mixed. The MEP claimed to have won the battle for Status Aparte, while the opposition pointed out that independence had not been the objective of the conference. The opinion of the electorate is difficult to ascertain because the elections that took place six weeks after the RTC were overshadowed by a shooting incident in which Betico Croes was wounded. The statehood issue took a back seat, and Croes won his biggest victory: his MEP party obtained thirteen of the twenty-one Island Council seats and thus the mandate to prepare the Status Aparte. The AVP left the coalition cabinet to make room for the victorious party at the national level (Alofs, 2001; Alofs & Merckies, 2001).

The year 1985

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Aruba's economy was thriving. The oil industry offered stable incomes to households and the government, tourism was expanding and there were indications that there were commercially viable oil deposits in the island's territorial waters. Aruba's future was promising, especially with the island standing on its own feet.

Perspectives changed radically in the fall of 1984 when Exxon gave notice that it would close the Lago refinery within half a year. Contrary to Curaçao, where the closing of the Shell refinery was averted by combined Dutch and Antillean diplomacy, Croes was not able to save Lago. This meant a loss of 4,000 jobs. Government revenues would drop by 40 percent, and the standard of living would drop by 30 percent after the introduction of tax measures proposed by the International Monetary Fund. Suddenly, Aruba was faced with the fact that it would enter Status Aparte during its deepest economic crisis since 1924. This caused thousands of Arubans to start thinking differently about Status Aparte and independence. Voices were raised to postpone or even cancel the Status Aparte. Some argued that Aruba would have to build a new economic order, where independence would deter potential investors. Parts of the population no longer accepted Croes' charisma and achievements as decisive electoral arguments.

In the run-up to the 1985 elections, alternatives appeared on the political playing field. The AVP (in opposition) launched an economic rescue plan as an alternative to the belt-tightening proposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In addition, smaller opposition parties presented themselves as alternatives to the established political landscape. The elections did indeed mark the end of MEP's dominance. The party remained the largest but was kept out of government by the opposition parties that formed a coalition that constituted the first government of the country of Aruba as of January 1, 1986. A few weeks after the lost election, just on New Year's Eve of 1985, Betico Croes fell into a coma as a result of a car accident. Eleven months later, on November 26, 1986, the still immensely popular politician died at the age of 48 (Alofs, 2001; Alofs & Merckies, 2001).

Domestic dynamics

In the 1940s and 1950s, the movement to obtain *separacion* was led by Henny Eman; in the 1970s and 1980s, it was led by Betico Croes. Eman was a representative of the socio-economic elite. School teacher Betico Croes was an exponent of the rural population. To both Eman and Croes, ethnic and island-based emancipation through mass mobilization of the traditional island population segment dispersed over the various townships on the island were key to success.

Ethnicity and insularism

Both in the 1940s and 1950s, and again in the 1970s and 1980s, separatist politics in the Kingdom went hand in hand with the emancipation of the local population vis-à-vis the migrant population who arrived in Aruba after the establishment of the oil industry. Afro-Caribbean migrants had obtained high positions in the refinery, the educational system, politics and government, while the native rural population profited significantly less from the modernization of the island. Racism surfaced when Eman tried to limit the electoral rights for Afro-Caribbean migrants between 1949 and 1954, a move which cost him their support. Ethnicity, class and regionalism quickly became the leading sociopolitical divides after the introduction of general suffrage. The PPA became the most successful political alliance, but the AVP and MEP took the lead in ethnic-insular nationalism.

Mass mobilization

Separatist leaders made good use of mass mobilization as a means to promote their ideals. In 1947, the Catholic Party in Curaçao proposed that Curaçao and Aruba would elect twelve and eight seated respectively in the Staten, energizing the Aruban separatist movement. Mass mobilization was the main strategy of protest. On September 7, 1947, Eman organized a meeting with 2,500 Aruban protesters; he organized transportation from the rural districts to Oranjestad and provided music, food and protest signs. In the months hereafter, Eman and his son Albert organized town hall meetings in the various districts and collected 2,147

signatures from Aruban men (no women, no migrants) in support of the separatist ideals. It was this petition that was presented to Queen Wilhelmina and the 1948 Round Table Conference.

Mass mobilization was also a strategy of the nationalist movement. On March 18, 1973, a mass protest took place during the meeting of the Kingdom Commission in Aruba. 6,000–8,000 protesters showed up, expressing their support for the separatist cause. Three years later, on March 18, 1976, Aruba introduced the National Holiday of Hymn and Flag. The 1977 referendum was also a means of mobilizing the population for the sake of the Status Aparte. Mass mobilization reached its highpoint at the 'Dark August' events of 1977.

After their electoral successes, separatists applied patronage politics either to confirm or to create political loyalty of their followers. Similar to previous and later parties in power, being in government offered careers in political appointments and in the civil service and provided work and income for those without work through the early 1980s temporary employment program. Patronage resulted in the advancement of the traditional MEP following (Alofs & Merckies, 2001).

Cultural nationalism and identity politics

Moreover, in the nationalist discourse, traditional Aruban folklore, such as the harvest festival San Juan and Aruban Papiamentu obtained a central place, but the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Lago migrants and Caribbean English felt neglected. In order to distinguish itself from Curaçao, in 1976, the Island Council adopted the etymological orthography for Aruban Papiamentu. This was against the advice of local teacher unions and language experts, but identity politics prevailed. In that same year, Curaçao and Bonaire adopted their own phonologically based spelling, creating two orthographies for one language and a three-island speech community of about 200,000 persons. Cultural nationalism was a successful strategy to further separatism but created a widening rift between the traditional island population and the Afro-Caribbean migrants and consequently a narrowing of the electoral base of the MEP.

International issues: Decolonization, non-disruption and independence

Aruban nationalists not only fought their struggle on the island but also within the Netherlands Antilles and in a transatlantic Dutch Kingdom. They had to navigate international developments in decolonization policies and practices all through the twentieth century.

After World War II, decolonization dominated the reform of the geo-political world order. In 1946, France integrated its Caribbean colonies as Departments d'Outre Mer, while British constitutional reform ended up in the creation of the failed West Indian Federation (1960–1962) and the fragmentation of decolonization in the British Caribbean. The 1948 Aruba-Curaçao Commission opted for a federal model for the future Dutch Antilles, but this was set aside in favour of a centralized

Dutch Antillean state structure and a hierarchically organized Kingdom. There was no question of secession or even the slightest hint of island-specific autonomy.

As of 1960, the route to secession was complicated by the United Nations' non-disruption principle: 'Any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations' (UN, 1960, p. 12; Hillebrink, 2008; Hu, 2014). This evoked questions on the rights of the self-determination of sub-national island units such as Aruba. In 1974, the sister islands recognized Aruba's rights for self-determination. The Netherlands accepted this right in the Report of the Kingdom Working Group (1980) and eventually for all six individual islands at the 1981 Round Table Kingdom Conference.

A third debate concerned the interpretation of the outcomes of decolonization. Well until the 1970s, the decolonization paradigm centred around the effectuation of self-determination through independence. However, this perspective has also changed for the Dutch Caribbean. The United States wanted to avoid trouble in its backyard – Central America and the Caribbean – and feared further independence and regional left-wing anti-Americanism such as in Nicaragua and Granada (Wehry, 1988; Grugel, 1995; Lewis et al., 2015). Times were changing: in 1983, Saint Kitts & Nevis was the last Caribbean colony to secure independence. After Brunei's independence in 1984, the massive wave of decolonization has largely ground to a halt: Timor-Leste in 2002, and South Sudan in 2012, are some exceptions.

The non-disruption principle was gradually set aside, and two new routes towards decolonization opened up to Aruban separatists: integration and free association. Constitutional reform entered into a decisive phase. Aruba preferred a Free Association option. In 1989, AVP luminaries A.G. Croes and R.R. Croes presented legal arguments for the implementation of the right to self-determination by *continued* – rather than *ruptured* – Kingdom relations. Not much later, Dutch minister Hirsch Ballin (1990) presented his Sketch for a Common Wealth construction for the Kingdom of the Netherlands in which he envisioned a Kingdom configuration consisting of four countries: the Netherlands, Aruba, Curaçao/Bonaire and the St. Maarten/St. Eustatius/Saba trio. In 1993, Hirsch Ballin organized a Kingdom Future Conference in Aruba. Independence was off the table, but the Conference did not result in a Common Wealth, nor the establishment of a four-country construction. On the contrary, the Netherlands accepted the continuation of the Kingdom ties. However, Dutch parliamentarians made it clear that the political price for the sustained Kingdom relations would be the strengthening of rule of law in the Dutch Caribbean jurisdictions. The Kingdom government would supervise what in the Caribbean was considered recolonization. In 1995, in the presence of Aruban Prime Minister Nelson O. Oduber (MEP), article 95 of the Charter holding the Aruba 1996 independence date was annulled. Aruba would remain in the Kingdom.

After savouring success

On January 1, 1986, Aruba entered Status Aparte while dark clouds hung over the tourist paradise. The economy was in a deep recession. Strengthening the tourism

sector was the obvious alternative, but broadening the economic base also seemed necessary, given the fragility of that one economic pillar. As a result of the economic decline, emigration was an outlet for the weakened labour market but also posed a threat to economic recovery, and forced independence hung like the sword of Damocles over Aruba.

Status Aparte turned out to be a blessing for economic recovery. An open sky economic policy turned out to be successful. Within ten years, the number of hotel rooms increased from 2,400 (1985) to 6,500 (1995); Aruba was visited by 72,000 cruise tourists in 1985 and by an astonishing 289,000 in 1999. In 1990, the Coastal Oil Company resumed oil refining in the abandoned Lago complex. Between 1986 and 1999, the average annual economic growth was no less than 8 percent (Haan, 2001, pp. 90–92).

Economic recovery had its limits and consequences. A broadening of the island's economic base remained elusive. Efforts to promote a tax-free zone, e-commerce, off-shore banking and the national airport into an international hub were only marginally successful. The expansion of tourism resulted in massive immigration and overpopulation (Alberts, 2020): Aruba's population increased to 117,000, or 650 inhabitants per km² in 2019. Given its high dependence on tourism, the island economy turned out to be highly vulnerable to external shocks such as the 9/11/2001 terrorist attacks and the 2008 banking crisis. In 2012, the closing of the refinery pushed Aruba back firmly into the status of a mono-economy, which was again severely felt during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ridderstaat, 2022).

Meanwhile, the Netherlands Antilles fell apart (Alofs, 2011; Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). In 2010, Curaçao and St. Maarten became non-sovereign countries within the Kingdom; Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba were incorporated in the Netherlands as special municipalities. In exchange for constitutional reform and the remission of their part of the Netherlands Antilles debt (1.6 billion Euro), Curaçao and Sint Maarten were forced to accept Consensus Kingdom Laws that seriously limit their autonomy. Financial supervision by the (formally mixed) General Financial Supervision Board has resulted in continuous tension between the new countries and the Netherlands. However, Dutch supervision could not prevent the national debts of Curaçao and St. Maarten from mounting back to 54.5 percent and 40.7 percent of GDP in 2017, respectively, and then increasing again to 100.2 percent and 77.9 percent, respectively, in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic (IMF, 2021).

Forced by the Netherlands, Aruba had accepted Status Aparte (1986) as a transition period to full independence by 1996. For this reason, no long-term agreements were made on good governance after 1995. Still, the Kingdom government intervened multiple times in Aruba's internal affairs. In 1993, the so-called The Hague Protocol resulted in an agreement between Prime Minister Nelson Oduber (1947–) and opposition leader Henny Eman to improve public administration. In the 1997 report '*Calidad*', crafted by the Aruban Working Group, 'Good Governance', presented ambitious targets and standards concerning party financing, training of civil servants and improvements in the relationship between state and citizenry. Despite good intentions, an avalanche of Kingdom (Dutch) and

Aruban reports continued to dispute the integrity and quality of Aruba's public administration.

In time, financial supervision was imposed on Aruba. In 2014, at the instigation of the Netherlands, the governor of Aruba refused to sign the national budget law of the coalition cabinet lead by AVP prime minister Mike Eman (1961–), brother of former prime minister Henny Eman. Eman went on a seven-day hunger strike but was eventually forced to accept financial supervision, although based on a national decree – to save the island or its prime minister's honour – instead of a Kingdom Law. Similar to Curaçao and St. Maarten, Aruba's yearly national budgets had to be approved by the General Financial Supervision Board (Afkondigingsblad 2015).

While discussions on the islands' administration continued, judicial inquiries by the Public Prosecutors of Curaçao/Sint Maarten and Aruba took place. This resulted, amongst other things, in convictions and imprisonments of former Curaçaoan Prime Minister Gerrit Schotte (2016) and Sint Maarten United People's Party leader and former minister Theo Heyliger (2020). Investigations against (former) government ministers of both AVP- and MEP-led coalition cabinets were carried out; one resulted in the conviction of former minister Paul Croes – a member of the extended Croes family but minister for the AVP – for corruption in 2019. Croes went on higher appeal. The outcome and three other indictments against two other former ministers and a member of Parliament are pending at the time of writing. The rule of law in the Dutch Caribbean is clearly under pressure (Schotborg-van der Ven, 2019; Transparency International, 2022).

And then there was COVID-19. During the pandemic, the tourist economy came to a standstill, the GDP per capita dropped from \$29,000 in 2017 to \$23,700 in 2021 and the national debt increased to 117 percent of GDP (IMF, 2022). To overcome the crisis, the MEP-led coalition government had to offer relief programs in the form of wage subsidies to companies and financial support to the unemployed. The Netherlands were willing to offer loans – € 442 million until March 2022 – under the strict condition of long term commitments on financial supervision, restructuring of government spending and a reform of the fiscal system. In 2022, financial supervision became a Kingdom Law, and Aruba agreed to yet another Consensus Kingdom Law that introduced a Caribbean Agency for Reform and Development that will design a long-term plan towards reducing the national debt for the Dutch Caribbean countries. Needless to say: supervision did not necessarily result in good governance but rather in frustrated non-sovereignty.

Conclusion and 'lessons learnt'

Aruba's separatist movement navigated multi-layered and dynamic political configurations. First and foremost, separatist leaders combined an ethnic and island-specific emancipatory movement by making use of identity politics, mass mobilization and political patronage. Second, given the two-tier structure of the Netherlands Antilles, separatists had to cooperate at least to some degree with the decolonization process and simultaneously create space for constitutional reform

within the Kingdom. Third, considering the three-tier structure of the Kingdom, separatists had to navigate complexities within the Dutch political landscape by applying smart and persistent negotiation strategies. Fourth, legal perspectives and political practices concerning the non-disruption principle and independence as the only outcome of decolonization shifted. New modalities of decolonization in the form of integration or free association with the metropole came to the forefront. Aruba successfully opted for free association. Fifth, and not discussed in this chapter, the integration of European states as the European Union opened options for relationships with Europe, such as Overseas Countries and Territories or as Ultraperipheral Regions; Aruban citizens with Dutch nationality have the right to vote for the European Parliament since 2009. Finally, the current financial supervision (or recolonization) of Aruba is the result of the small island state's inability to realize good governance and safeguard the rule of law according to changing local, Kingdom and international standards.

To conclude and to compare: smallness stimulates power concentration and the development of patron-client linkages, which would decrease the influence of citizens (Baldacchino & Veenendaal, 2018; Gerring & Veenendaal, 2020). The study by Roitman and Veenendaal (2016) on political oligarchies in Dutch St Maarten confirms that smallness, islandness and non-sovereignty help create sociopolitical contexts in which 'gate keeper' families control positions of power and regulate the flow of power of information and political influence. 'Excessive personalism' creates asymmetrical relationships between gate keepers and the electorate which strengthens and continues the gate keeper's political capital. (Roitman & Veenendaal, 2016, p. 84). Apparently, and different from St Maarten, Aruba's small island context is big enough for two competing oligarchic gate-keeping families to co-exist and compete: Eman and Croes. Henny Eman's son Albert became the victorious opposition leader in 1967; his grandsons Henny Eman (1986–1989) and Mike Eman (2009–2017) both served as prime ministers. Betico Croes' brother Hendrik Croes was minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs for the Netherlands Antilles (1973–1975, 1979–1981, 1984–1985) and Aruba's minister of Justice (1989–1993). Younger brother Rudy Croes became Minister of Justice (1993–1994, 2001–2009) and also Sports (1993–1994). Betico Croes' sons, Glenbert Croes (1994–1997, 2000–2001) and Gilberto F. 'Junior' Croes (1998–1999), were both ministers in the Henny Eman-led coalition cabinets. Since 2017, Glenbert Croes has been minister in the two cabinets under the leadership of Aruba's first female prime minister, Eveline Wever Croes, daughter of Hendrik Croes.

Both families have strong and flexible political machineries at their disposal and, given their party's access to governmental resources over different periods of time, they can maintain and nurture patron-client relationships. This provides them both with a solid electoral base, but neither of the two holds a monopoly over sheer structural power, information and network relations. In the case of Aruba, political creativity and skill in mobilizing the masses, identity politics and persistence in convincing the Kingdom partners have been crucial for the cause of Status Aparte. Both the Eman and Croes families have been champions in dodging

international interpretations of the right of self-determination and non-disruption. Both sworn political enemies can take credit for the realization of Status Aparte (which they do) and also for the tightening of the island's autonomy due to the lack of good governance (of which they accuse each other).

Islands across the globe have experienced many different routes to decolonization (Aldrich & Johnson, 2018). Often colonial powers were unwilling to grant independence to small islands for various reasons: economic, military strategic, geopolitical or simply because of a concern about the viability rule of law in the sometimes 'underdeveloped' island units. Island colonies Guadeloupe, Martinique and Saint Martin (technically half an island) in the French Caribbean were assimilated into the metropolitan state. Others, such as Anguilla, Bermuda and the British Virgin Islands, Montserrat and the Cayman Islands ended up as United Kingdom Overseas Territories (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2003; Alofs, 2011). The Aruba case for separatism and non-sovereignty is an example of a determined small island society that, against all odds, and against larger and more powerful Kingdom partners, can be successful.

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